

December 1, 2011

South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA PROGRAMS

The South Dakota Funeral Directors Association will host *Wreaths Across America*, a national program that pays tribute to fallen veterans of all wars during the Christmas season. Their formal wreath presentation will be held at the Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial on Capitol Lake in Pierre at 11 a.m. CST on Monday, December 5.

Participants in this ceremony are the board of directors and members of the South Dakota Funeral Directors Association, Pierre Post 8 American Legion, Pierre VFW Post 2038, Oahe Marine Corps League, Vietnam Era Veterans Association and the Disabled American Veterans. Featured speakers will include Morrie Comes, SDFDA president, and South Dakota National Guard Maj. Ken Kerfont. The T.F. Riggs High School Chamber Choir under the direction of Rodd Bauck will perform the national anthem.

The Black Hills National Cemetery and Hot Springs National Cemetery will host *Wreaths Across America* ceremonies at 10:00 am on Saturday, December 10, at the Black Hills National Cemetery (20901 Pleasant Valley Drive—Sturgis) and Hot Springs National Cemetery (500 N. 5th Street—Hot Springs).

The Wreaths Across America story began in 1992 when Worcester Wreath Company, a non-profit organization from Harrington, Maine, began a tradition of placing wreaths on the headstones at Arlington National Cemetery during the holidays.

In 2010, Wreaths Across America and its national network of volunteers laid more than 220,000 memorial wreaths at 545 locations in the United States and beyond, in honor of fallen soldiers. In 2011, it is projected that more than 400,000 wreaths will be placed nationwide, by more than 150,000 volunteers, as part of the Wreaths Across America Project.



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RECOMMENDED HOLIDAY MAILING DATES

Holiday mail sent via first-class mail and priority mail for servicemembers stationed in Afghanistan should be sent by Dec. 4 for arrival by Christmas.

The Postal Service offers free military care kits, designed for military families sending packages overseas. The mailing kits can be ordered by phone by calling 800-610-8734 and asking for the military care kit. Each kit includes two "America Supports You" large priority mail flat-rate boxes, four medium-sized priority mail flat-rate boxes, six priority mail labels, one roll of priority mail tape and six customs forms with envelopes.

All mail addressed to military post offices overseas is subject to certain conditions or restrictions regarding content, preparation and handling. APO/FPO addresses generally require customs forms. To get updated mailing restrictions by individual APO/FPO zip go to www.usps.com.

Some military overseas mailing and packaging tips are:

- If you use a regular box, use one strong enough to protect the contents with no writing on the outside.
- Cushion contents with newspaper, bubble wrap, or styrofoam. Pack tightly to avoid shifting.
- Package food items like cookies, fudge, candies, etc. securely in leak-proof containers.
- Use pressure-sensitive or nylon-reinforced packing tape.
- Do not use wrapping paper, string, masking tape, or cellophane tape outside the package.
- Print the complete military service member's name (without rank), unit, and APO/FPO delivery address, and your return address on one side only of the package.
- Place a return address label inside the package.
- Stuff fragile items with newspaper or packing material to avoid damage
- Remove batteries from toys/appliances. Wrap and place them next to the items inside.
- Purchase insurance and delivery confirmation service for reassurance of package delivery.

CARING IS A STAIRWAY THAT NEVER ENDS

After setting a goal to put together 50 care packages for South Dakota military members overseas; the general manager of the Fort Pierre AmericInn says that goal was doubled and a total of 125 boxes were able to be made.

The AmericInn in Fort Pierre received several donations of items like food treats, personal care items, clothing, games and more-and a group gathered at the business on Veterans Day to put together the gift boxes.

General Manager Brenda Sharkey says donors also gave enough monetary donations for the effort to pay \$13 to ship each box. Excess funds were given to the Blue Star Mothers.



VETERAN LEADERS MEET WITH CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

On Friday, November 18, leaders from within the veterans network in western South Dakota met with the staff of South Dakota's congressional delegation. These meetings are typically held every other month and rotate between Hot Springs, Rapid City, and Fort Meade.

Veterans service officers and representatives from the area veterans service organizations were joined by congressional staffers: Joe Roberts (Sen. Johnson), Jesse Ewing (Sen. Thune), and Danica Allmer (Rep. Noem); as well as leadership from the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Dr. Fedders, C&P Examiner, was the featured speaker at this meeting; and Acting Director Steve DiStasio, chaired the meeting.

Rick Earhardt, Bandon Schultz, and Jim Brubaker, staff from the regional office, also participated in the meeting via V-Tel.

Ken Irwin (Custer County), Jerry Lolley (Meade County), Paul Miller (Fall River County), Neal Lutke (Pennington County), and three VSOs from Nebraska were the VSOs in attendance. Field Officer Paul Gremse represented the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.



NEW CVSOS AT MCCOOK AND CLARK

Bruce Brekke has been named the Clark County Veterans Service Officer.

Phone Number: 605-532-5435

Email Address: clarkvso@itctel.com

Office Hours: 9:00 am—4:00 pm on Monday

9:00 am—12:00 noon on Tuesday

Keith Aden has been named the McCook County Veterans Service Officer.

Phone Number: 605-425-2485

Email Address: mccookvso@triotel.net

Office Hours: 8:00 am—4:30 pm on Monday and Wednesday

THE GIFT OF GIVING

For many of us the Christmas season started the day after Thanksgiving, for others it started December 1, and for others it will start immediately following the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Unknown to the veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and the veterans at the VA Hospital in Hot Springs, their Christmas started November 23.

On November 23, members of the Pierre Elks Lodge #1953 delivered collection boxes to over 30 locations throughout Pierre, Fort Pierre, Blunt, Presho and Draper. Over the next three weeks, these boxes will be filled with books, socks, robes, blankets, candy, puzzles, DVDs, video games, toiletries, undergarments, food, and much, much more.

Norman Wesley Brooks, in his 1976 *"Let Every Day be Christmas"* wrote, "Christmas is forever, not for just one day; for loving, sharing and giving are not to be put away like bells and lights and tinsel in some box upon a shelf. The good you do for others is good you do yourself." The Elks, in their mission to help build strong communities and to keep true to their pledge to not forget the veterans demonstrate that Christmas is forever! Their commitment to South Dakota's veterans is an ongoing commitment.



Santa's Helpers

On December 16, the Elks Elves will travel back to each of the 30 locations and collect all of the items donated. They will then spend the next few days,

sorting and packing the numerous items so that they are ready for delivery on December 19.

The Elks spirit of Christmas does not end with the collection of gifts. They secure the assistance of other elves in these communities. Elves, like the elementary students who create holiday cards and posters; elves like Diane London from Perkins who assembles goodie bags of fruit, candy and nuts; and elves like the Pierre Senior Citizens who contribute hundreds of homemade cookies and bars, as well as stuffed animals for the veterans in the dementia unit.

We plan to follow the elves as they collect, sort, transport and deliver their holiday packages that overflow with blessings rich and eternal to South Dakota's veterans.

MILESTONE REACHED

Paul Redfield, a resident of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs, created a design for, and got approved, burial vessels for fellow veterans and their spouses. Both the casket and the urn are constructed of oak. To date, 157 caskets and 68 urns have been completed. In fact, the team of three in the photo below, just completed building their 100th casket. Information about the Veterans Honored Interment program can be found at:

<http://mva.sd.gov/News/Veterans%20Home/State%20Veterans%20Home%20VHI%20Program.pdf>

Every action in our lives touches on some chord that will vibrate in eternity (Edwin Hubbel Chapin)



Unselfish and noble actions are the most radiant pages in the biography of souls (David Thomas)

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 2—SD Veterans Council Legislator Roundtable—Watertown
December 2—Memorial Service for Doug Brown—3:00 pm—Sioux Falls VAHCS
December 3—SD Veterans Council Legislator Roundtable—Sioux Falls
December 5—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—11:00 AM—Capitol Lake, Pierre
December 6—Governor Dugaard's Budget Address
December 8—SD Veterans Commission Conference Call Meeting
December 10—National Wreaths Across America Remembrance
December 26—State Offices Closed
January 2—State Offices Closed
January 10—Legislative Session Opens

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